

# George Bernard Shaw once said, “If you can’t get rid of the family skeleton, you might as well make it dance.”

Written 2008 by Jackie Layne Partin

Family research is my one and only “hobby”. A few years back I paid ten dollars on the internet to get an address for one Alice Layne whose name I got from the back of an old photo in my mother’s cache after her death in 1999. After pressing and pestering my uncles and aunts who lived in other states, they finally came up with Massachusetts as being the state where this cousin might have lived. So on May 17, 2003, I wrote her a letter, “*Dear Alice, ...if you are our Alice... and if you have the time, please write me...*” Ten days later I received this letter, “*Dear Jackie, What a wonderful surprise, after being away for a few days, to open my mailbox and find your letter there. Yes, I am the Alice you are looking for. I hardly know where to begin...*” I could hardly keep from turning a back flip when I realized that I had found a long lost cousin.



Jennie Anderson Layne, Uncle Grover Cleveland Layne and baby Alice Layne



Rush Monroe and Jennie Layne (Alice’s parents)

Under the northern bluffs of Forrest Point in Monteagle, Tennessee, on the first bench as we call it, Monroe and Rebecca Jane Cox Layne reared a family of nine children. One of their sons was Rush Monroe Layne born in 1895. He joined the Army and settled near the Boston, Massachusetts area where he married Jennie Anderson; Alice was their first child. Since her father died in 1923, and she lived so far away, the information about her Layne heritage was limited until the above mentioned letter arrived. Her uncle, Alex Layne, was my grandfather. What is so sad about this situation is that I was reared within a mile or so of Forrest Point, and I knew nothing about my heritage. Alice had an excuse, but I didn’t. I never asked my elders any questions; I made no notes; there were no family Bible records; and family trees were not required by Mrs. Carden in my third grade class in 1950 at the new Monteagle School. By the time I became interested in the history of Monteagle and my

Layne family, which hailed from Layne's Cove, my older, loved ones had passed away. There were only a few persons left to ask about family or old Monteagle, and I accused all of *them* of being asleep. I protested; I told them to wake up their brains and help me in my search for family history. Some began to say, "I remember when ...," or "Mama, told me ...," or "Daddy said ...". Now, we were on our way.

Imagine how surprised and curious I was when one of these relatives told me that the house that I called "home" until my mother's death, was on the very spot where the old Monteagle School once stood on the corner of King and Second Streets; that the lumber in the house was part of the old school building; that Charlie Meeks built our house, Jamey and Louise Meeks' house and the Wilma Farmer house all from the old school ruins; that the huge, wide, worn path around our house was probably put there by many, many little feet from as far back as pre-1900; and that the dirt between the roots of the two huge oak trees in our yard was packed hard by the hundreds of children who sat on the roots at playtime. I never could understand why we had such huge well-worn cement steps at the back door of our little house. They must have been left from the school building. And of course there was that curious little footpath of sandstones on the right side of our house that seemed to come from nowhere and go nowhere. I never walked on them that I didn't wonder who put them there and why they were there—going nowhere. Now, my dilemma was how could anyone as lost as I, help Alice with her many questions? But with excitement, I welcomed her into the Monteagle Layne family and filled her in as I discovered bits and pieces.

Sweet Alice in turn **shared** her newly found family with another lost Layne. Was this lost one a cousin of ours? Could she finally find her ancestors in the Monteagle area? When Alice's phone rang that day, the lady on the other end of the line told her that her father was a Layne from Monteagle and Tracy City. The lady, Anna Layne Sprankell, wanted to know if Alice could tell her anything about the Monteagle Laynes. Thankfully at that time, Alice herself had enough information to give the lady my address and phone number. She also called me and gave me Anna's phone number. If money had been falling from the heavens, I would have left my gathering of it to make the phone call. Excitedly and eagerly, I made the call even before she could contact me. The disgust I had with myself for not asking my grandfather Alex Layne questions, was becoming less burdensome. I could see light at the end of the tunnel. What if I could help someone else find Monteagle and Laynes Cove by shedding just a little light on the subject? Or more importantly, what if she could help me with information or some of those old, old photographs that all researchers yearn to find!

Overwhelmed by the information I was feeding her, Anna began to tell me her story. It seemed that her father, Walter Dee Layne, had been born in Laynes Cove and grew up in Monteagle. His family had lived a few years at Pryor Ridge where his father worked in the coalmines. He had never told Anna or her siblings, any of that

information or anything about his Layne heritage. He had always told the family that he was an orphan and did not know who his people were. *There's a skeleton in the closet somewhere!!* After many years of wondering who her Layne grandparents were, in 1986 while her father lay dying, she asked once more, "Dad, who are my Layne grandparents?" Suddenly, *the skeleton began to dance*; she got her answer, "Sim and Josephine Layne...you will find out about them in Monteagle or Tracy City, Tennessee."



Sim and Josephine Layne with sons Arthur Lee and Robert Overton



Looking down Cox Hollow and over into Laynes Cove. The little group of houses seen center of picture down in the valley is a community called Piedmont nestled across the road from the sign that Anna saw.

In December 2006, a week before Christmas, Anna, her brother Edward Lee Layne and one sister Marilyn Rae, came to Monteagle Mountain to meet for the first time four of their first cousins and of course me, a distant cousin. Not following their directions carefully, they went off the mountain on the old 41 highway until they came to a sign which read, "*Laynes Cove*". Anna was lost in her directions, but found at that moment where she really belonged. I had told her by phone and emails how John and Esther Kilgore Layne had come from Victoria in Marion County over into Hollingsworth Cove as it was known back then; they had filled the cove so full of their Layne descendants that it was eventually called *Laynes Cove*. Their firstborn son, Abraham K. Layne, born around 1828/9, married his first cousin Elender Tennessee Kilgore and fathered eighteen children, and this family came to live in Laynes Cove. Only three of the children survived to parent children—*Monroe, Simeon and Daniel*. I told Anna that this Simeon was her grandfather. Sim, as he was known, married Josephine Cook and their last child Walter Dee was Anna's father. At that *Laynes*

*Cove Church of God* sign, Anna and her siblings became connected to their past. She felt a sudden sense of belonging—never mind that as yet, she knew not to whom she belonged, but she knew at that moment that she “belonged.”



Anna's Layne's Newly Discovered Family: L to R: Dearie, Herman, Josephine Cook Layne, Sim Layne, Walter Dee (Anna's father), Lizzie and Arthur Layne: Robert is the only living child at the time not pictured. All of these ancestors had passed on before Anna found any cousins.

After a couple of phone calls and a careful reading of the directions I had sent, the siblings made their way to the home of Alvin and Shirley Dykes in Tracy City. Shirley is a daughter of Lizzie Layne Cox, a child of Sim and Josie Layne; this made her a first cousin to Anna. Shirley's sisters, Josephine Cox Hill, Carolyn Cox Gautier, and a brother Bobby Cox all met Anna, Edward Lee and Marilyn for the first time. *That old skeleton was really dancing!!* No one in the group asked, “How much money do you make, or from what college did you graduate?” It was all tears and joy and happiness. The questions and statements were, “I love you, and I'm so glad we found each other!” “Why did Daddy keep us in the dark about our heritage?” “Did you know our grandparents?” “You look just like my brother, or you have the same name as our cousin, and on and on!” The most important statement I heard was, “I wish Daddy had told us about his people so that we could have always known each other!” Josephine remembered seeing Anna as a small child, but knew nothing of her whereabouts for years. Anna had no remembrance of ever meeting any of her Layne cousins.



Anna meets her first cousin Josephine for the first time.



First cousins meet for the first time: back Bobby Cox, Edward Layne, 3<sup>rd</sup> row back: Shirley Cox Dykes, Anna Layne Sprankell, Seated: Josephine Cox Hill, Carolyn Cox Gautier and front: Marilyn Rae Layne Comer

Another reunion was planned for all the first cousins (there are more) in the Spring. At that reunion Anna came back and brought these siblings, Edward Lee, Vikki, Stevie and Walter, Jr. Marilyn Rae lived too far away to make this trip. I took the group on a drive through Laynes Cove and the Monteagle Assembly (*their grandfather Sim Layne was on the building crew for the first auditorium*). Then we drove to Tracy City to eat a big lunch at the home of Shirley Dykes. Another period of joy, happiness and questions came about since Shirley's other brother Buddy and some nieces were present to meet Anna and her siblings. What a wonderful day we had together. However, unknown to us at the moment, there was a terrible tragedy playing out not too many miles out of Tracy City on the Jasper Highway. A terrible wreck had claimed the lives of Josephine Cox Hill's daughter and granddaughter; before the day was over one of Buddy Cox's grandsons was also killed in an automobile wreck here in Grundy County. Three cousins, three descendants of Sim and Josie Layne, were gone in one afternoon. So what started out as a wonderful day ended sadly in two different tragedies. I felt a sense of urgency in finding the one more living first cousin, Florence Layne Boynton, daughter of Robert Overton Layne, to see if we could bring her into our "first cousin gang."



Anna at Layne's Cove with Edith Hill Layne whose husband was Abe Layne, Jr. a cousin to Sim



Anna at Warren's Point overlooking Layne's Cove and Pelham Valley

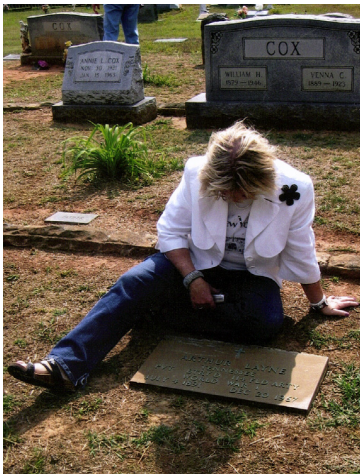


The Assembly entrance as Sim Layne would have seen it in 1900.



The Assembly auditorium which Sim Layne worked on.

Before we learned of the wreck, we took the visiting cousins to the Summerfield Cemetery where their ancestors are buried. Then we went on to the Monteagle Cemetery where their grandparents Sim and Josie Layne are buried. It was obvious that these were long overdue moments. We were sad to see the visiting cousins leave, and on their way home, they went by a wreck on the Tracy City/Jasper Highway. Unknown to them, those involved in the wreck were their cousins, they slowly passed and went on their way full of talk about what they had found out about their heritage.



Vikki Layne Travis ponders her Uncle Arthur's military stone.



The tiny stone in the Monteagle Cemetery for the cousins' grandfather Sim Layne. Sim's wife Josie, his son Herman, and twin daughters Lily May and Lily Bell lie to the south of his stone.

Some weeks later I finally found an address for one Florence Layne Boynton in Dunlap. I wrote her in September, and she quickly responded by a phone call. We exchanged phone calls several times. Unknown to me, in October she had been

diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She never mentioned it to me. Then she did the most wonderful thing—a researcher’s dream—she mailed me a copy of the Sim Layne family photograph presented previously. Then finally on one occasion after I had asked her how she was, she told me that the doctors had found tumors on her pancreas. I didn’t want to ask, but I had to, “Florence, are they cancerous?” “Yes.” I asked her if she would feel well enough to have some of her cousins visit her, and she was so hospitable in her answer, “Come anytime. I don’t go out to see doctors anymore. I am on hospice care.” My heart sank.

Two of her first cousins: Anna and Shirley, and I went to see Florence. She was a pretty lady and so kind. Her husband James helped her out of the bed so that she could sit and talk with us for a while. We exchanged pictures and stories and hugs and love. She let us see her albums and her family Bible. Her husband James was so kind to her and us. They let us take some photographs to Wal-Mart to copy, and after we had some lunch, we came back to return the photographs and tell Florence good-bye. She was asleep, so we spoke with James and left, knowing that we would never see Florence again, at least in this world. She died two weeks later.



Florence Ellen Layne Boynton (1926-2008)

Whatever the reason was that kept these Layne cousins apart, it was not so important once the skeleton started dancing. Thankfully, all is not lost; much is found, and we are all searching together now for our little part in the history of Laynes Cove and Monteagle. My hope is that this little story will encourage you to search for your heritage. Some facts that you learn may be unpleasant, but the good far outweighs the bad. Make your skeletons dance! Happy Hunting! (For corrections or additions contact Jackie Layne Partin, P. O. Box 295, Monteagle, TN 37356 or ph. 931-592-3650 or [jackiepartin@blomand.net](mailto:jackiepartin@blomand.net) .)